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spring calf rearing market a similar price will be just as necessary, but even less likely to be achieved.

Last year Hitchcock saw the best autumn calves fetch \$400-420 but settle around \$360. The spring market is traditionally lower value, and \$400/head almost unheard of.

"In the area we cover from lower Waikato to the top of the North Island, we would have 30,000-40,000 less beef animals and it begs the question, where are they going to come from?"

Dairy conversions and support blocks have accounted for much of the decline, while drought still sees some farmers struggling to finish spring-born stock.

Much swings on the grass supply between now and November. If NIWA's predictions for a warmer wetter winter prove true, a lucrative spring weaner market may open up, encouraging bigger calf numbers to be reared for spring.

"I hope so, we need it."

PCCS agent for the King Country Pat Lacy told *Country-Wide* he expects to see two to three years of lower store stock numbers.

"Over the past three years store stock guys have had the sharp end of the stick really, paying the equivalent of 60% of finished price, when it should be nearer 45%.

"I expect we may see a better fat schedule, but a reasonably low store schedule."

A continuing tight grass supply may yet see significant numbers of stock come onto the market in June if cold conditions prevail, and less incentive for stocking up over spring.

"We may go down the same line as dairying this year, a good payout, but unable to deliver the volume due to the weather."

AFFCo livestock manager Gerald Scantlebury says he is surprised to learn of poor interest from calf rearers, given the prospects for the year ahead.

"We are having difficulties getting any exact numbers on calves coming through. We would expect though, that with AB going longer, there could be more dairy bulls on the ground this spring. The higher numbers going to pet food could occur if you get more AB Jersey bull calves. They are lighter and worth so little they end up as pet food.

"I agree with the comparison to the dairy industry, that things are coming right but we simply don't have the numbers, but those that stick with it will be rewarded."

CEO for Riverlands, Trevor Johnson told *Country-Wide* the outlook was all good for beef, and he was aiming to encourage as many rearers as possible to stick with their business.

"I am surprised about calves getting their heads chopped off early, we will be needing the numbers going forward, given how positive the prospects are," he says.

Colostrum vital

Which would you rather do: pay a \$5 premium for a calf that has been protected from rotavirus scours through a proper vaccination programme, or risk having to pay \$15-20 a day to keep an unprotected calf alive when it comes down with scours?

That's the attention-focusing question that independent calf-rearing consultant Bas Schouten asks his clients.

Speaking at a calf-rearing seminar co-hosted with Schering-Plough Animal, Schouten says that along with good housing and nutrition, proper colostrum feeding is the cornerstone of a successful calf-rearing venture, whether it is for dairy replacements or the calves sourced for large-scale dairy beef operations. And if calves are to be protected from rotavirus scours through vaccination of their dams, proper colostrum feeding is essential.

Colostrum is a rich source of immunoglobulins and energy and growth factors. It's liquid gold. There's no point just feeding colostrum from the first 24

hours and then selling the rest to make a profit.

"As far as I'm concerned, that's bad practice."

Schouten says that while vaccination against rotavirus scours undoubtedly pays dividends, he doesn't recommend it automatically.

"Your vet can advise you on the protocols to suit your property. For example, if you operate a closed herd, with no bought-in stock, the rotavirus risk might be relatively low."

But with the rapid growth in the dairy industry and frequent movement of stock between properties, the risk is often higher, Bas concedes.

Saleyards especially are hotbeds of infection from rotavirus, coronavirus and salmonella among young calves. People who buy large numbers of calves for rearing operations prefer to buy directly from trusted suppliers where there is some certainty that the calves have been properly protected. With calves costing \$150-\$200, a premium of a few dollars for animals vaccinated would be well worthwhile."

Solution to mastitis in heifers

Mastitis infections in heifers can prove a debilitating, on-going check to a section of the dairy herd's greatest productive potential.

Trials have proven herd owners can expect declines in a season's production of 8% in heifers affected by mastitis.

There is also greater risk of light quarters and clinical mastitis developing in the next lactation.

One farmer very aware of the inherent stresses of having mastitis in his heifers is eastern Waikato equity partner Paul Kampshof. Clinical mastitis had blighted up to 30% of his heifers post-calving for four seasons on the Wardville property he farms

With 80 heifers a year coming into the 400 head herd, it has proved a frustrating, time consuming and expensive problem at a busy time of year.

Research published in 2006 indicated on average, the cost to treat a short-term single clinical mastitis case is \$100 in antibiotics and lost milk.

Paul had "followed the book" to try and avoid the stressful headache. He adhered to recommendations made in LIC's SAMM Plan. This included cutting back on grass pre-calving and supplementing with hay, ensuring clean pasture over calving and keeping the heifers in a separate mob to the older cows.

"There seemed to be something that made the heifers here more likely to become infected, we really had a difficult time trying to identify it."

Research at Dexcel, now DairyNZ, has shown the bacteria *Streptococcus uberis* (*S.uberis*) is present in effluent of up to 20% of animals on New Zealand farms.

Scientists suspect a cycle of re-

infection and bacteria shedding within the farm environment may contribute to perennial problems on some properties.

Waikato trials on heifer mastitis have revealed *S.uberis* present in 56% of all clinical mastitis cases tested. Understanding about how infection occurs has grown significantly in recent years, thanks to several intensive field trials conducted in NZ.

Three weeks before calving an increased number of heifers experience an opening of their teat canals as the keratin seal breaks down in anticipation of lactation commencing.

In heifers that retain that keratin seal, 85% will not contract any bacterial infection.

However half those losing the seal will contract minor infection and these heifers are twice as likely to develop infection prior to calving.

The insertion of Teatseal into the teat canal before it starts to widen acts as a physical barrier, reducing the risk of bacterial invasion and therefore lowering the risk of the udder being exposed to new infections.

Typically Teatseal has been applied at the end of lactation in low somatic cell cows. It has proven to successfully reduce the dry period infection rate by 94%, and by 65% at calving time, compared to cows not treated at all.

"Our vet suggested we try using Teatseal on the heifers pre-calving, something I had never heard of, and had to wonder just how it would go," says Paul.

Research has shown Teatseal provides a viable economic alternative for preventing mastitis in heifers, rather than taking the high risk option of trying to treat with intramammary penicillin.

It's travelled all the way from Texas to Te Kuiti.

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